

August 25, 1966

Dr. Carl Clark  
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Dear Carl:

I was indeed fascinated to read your material on the air stop restraint system and am certainly appalled that this kind of investigation does not receive more enthusiastic support. Is this still a problem with you? Can you analyze what the deeper causes of the difficulty are -- could it have something to do with the fact that the proposals come from an industrial outfit with which, for example, NIH is not so well equipped to deal?

It seems to me that the really important development would be the automatic inflation upon impact but I really do wonder about the feasibility of a sufficiently rapid inflation which would not itself be extremely traumatic to the passengers. Even so, I could certainly see the point of a premonitory inflation that could with a few seconds notice, give substantial protection to the "wife and kids" but I think that many people would still argue that any system that impeded the driver's manipulation of the controls might end up doing as much harm as good over the range of cases where it might be applied. Obviously, as you point so vehemently, much more research is needed on these questions and the mere epidemiological magnitude of traffic deaths should place this very high on the list of priorities.

I have been interested in traffic safety for quite a long time and like yourself been impressed with the lack of scientific information in the field. In 1955 one of my favorite graduate students suffered an eventually lethal cranial injury from an accident that would certainly have been trivial if he had been properly restrained. I did testify before the Wisconsin legislature concerning seat belt legislation but it was, of course, some few years later before any action began to be taken there or any where else.

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It would be an intriguing subject to deal with in one of my columns in The Washington Post but I think it might be rather too special to concentrate on just the air stop. If you know of any more comprehensive treatment that includes some other remedial approaches, I would be pleased to have you direct me to them.

With best regards,

Joshua Lederberg,  
Professor of Genetics

JL/gem